CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FOURTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 26 August 1999, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Leslie Luck (Australia)

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The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 834th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I should like, at the outset, to extend a very warm welcome to the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala, whose presence among us again today testifies to his deep interest in our endeavours and to his support for our Conference.

As you are aware, two of our esteemed colleagues, Ambassador André Mernier of Belgium and Ambassador Frank Majoor of the Netherlands, will soon leave our Conference, having been called to other important responsibilities by their respective Governments. During their time here, they have presented and defended the positions of their Governments on issues under discussion at the Conference with an authority and diplomatic talent which I think we have all recognized. They also contributed to the common effort to narrow differences among delegations on the important issues before the Conference. I am sure that I speak on behalf of all of us when I express to Ambassador Majoor and to Ambassador Mernier, and to their families, our very best wishes for their continued success and their personal happiness in the future.

I have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of Chile, Belgium and the Netherlands. Before giving them the floor, however, I should like to remind you that immediately following this plenary meeting we shall hold an informal plenary meeting to start consideration of the draft annual report, as contained in document CD/WP.503. With those comments, I should now like to give the floor to the representative of Chile, Ambassador Javier Illanes.

Mr. ILLANES (Chile) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, as you have taken up your post as the new President of the Conference, I would like first of all to congratulate you and offer you our wholehearted cooperation in the discharge of your important responsibilities. I wish at the same time to express appreciation for and single out most particularly the successful efforts of your predecessor, Ambassador González, of Argentina, to secure the agreement on the expansion of the Conference, as well as his work and initiatives to gain approval for the programme of work of this negotiating forum on disarmament.

I also wish to express our appreciation for the excellent work carried out in this same regard by Ambassador Dembri of Algeria, who has left us, as a result of his remarkable endeavours and abilities, one of the texts which, although of an informal nature, seems to be closest to bringing together the wishes of the Conference. Lastly, I cannot fail to acknowledge the strenuous and dedicated efforts made throughout the present year by all the previous Presidents of the Conference to find formulas to allow us to initiate our substantive work. I also wish to associate myself with your words of farewell and good wishes to our distinguished colleagues from Belgium and Holland, who have played such an outstanding role in this Conference and who, regrettably for us, are now leaving. Allow me also to extend a welcome and express our sincere congratulations to the five new member countries who were recently admitted to the Conference on Disarmament. To all of them we offer our fullest support in their future work.

(Mr. Illanes, Chile)

The decision to expand the number of members has become the most important event which has taken place in this forum during the present year. It is at the same time a reflection of and a hope for the Conference's capacity to progress in the right direction in spite of the obvious difficulties which obstruct the reaching of agreements. The distance covered by the Conference on Disarmament to come to this decision illustrates graphically the extreme complexity and uncertainty of the process of seeking consensus and taking decisions.

Analysis of the phases through which, in the course of the present year, the successive Presidents of the Conference have had to discharge their difficult duties, even given the excellent cooperation on the part of the secretariat, confirms that in 1999 we face a situation of aggravated deadlock, within the tendency which has been displayed in this Conference since 1996, after the conclusion of the work on an instrument for the prohibition of nuclear tests.

In the post-cold-war world which emerged at the beginning of the present decade, the initial phase of optimism, cooperation and the adoption of major decisions in the field of world strategic policy has gradually been replaced by another in which narrow individual and often intransigent considerations on the part of the various international actors tend to prevail. This has generated a global strategic situation of increased insecurity and instability which is undermining earlier efforts towards non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and would seem to be fostering a discouraging tendency towards rearmament and proliferation. This is due to the existence of numerous political difficulties of various kinds which are in evidence today in the strategic and international security field. It seems obvious that, at present, the world urgently needs to re-establish a climate of trust and cooperation in the process of reduction and control of weapons of mass destruction, and principally nuclear weapons.

As mentioned in the recent report issued by the "Tokyo Forum", on nuclear dangers, whose content my delegation shares to a large extent, in order for this process to be possible, there is a need, in the first place, for the major nuclear Powers to solve their political differences, which constitute an important cause of the difficulties being encountered by the process of reducing nuclear weapons, including regional issues of security and proliferation. It is well known that this Forum brought together a group of distinguished disarmament experts of the highest level and standing, at the initiative of the Government of Japan. The group's review of the peace and security situation in the world in connection with national and multilateral efforts to achieve disarmament is most valuable. Although many may not agree with one aspect or another of its conclusions, the merit of their analysis as a whole is undeniable.

We are all aware of the various events in the recent past which have gradually weakened the fabric of international security and, in particular, caused cracks in the edifice of non-proliferation. The list is long and there is no point in repeating it. Suffice it to say that as a result of these events and of the persistence of narrow policies, the link between nuclear

(Mr. Illanes, Chile)

non-proliferation and the reduction of nuclear weapons, including the ultimate objective of achieving complete nuclear disarmament, has been weakened. In fact, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the momentum that had been generated by the end of the cold war to make a universal and effective global nuclear non-proliferation regime a reality is in danger of being lost. Additionally, other new risks of nuclear proliferation come from different directions, resulting from such varied factors as the absence of proper security measures to prevent the transfer of materials, technology or weapons across borders; the maintenance of clandestine programmes by member countries of the NPT or regional agreements; the possibility that terrorist groups may acquire access to ownership of nuclear technology and materials; the lower relative cost of and easier access to components for nuclear weapons; the military superiority of the conventional arms stockpiles of technologically advanced States, which may lead other States to revise their views as to the importance of weapons of mass destruction; and, in general, the fact that proliferation on the part of one State or region may trigger proliferation in others. It is obvious that these threats to non-proliferation need to be urgently addressed.

As stated in the above-mentioned Tokyo Forum report, we are all sufficiently aware of the disastrous and long-lasting consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. This was demonstrated to us by experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, such as those suffered by the cities and that is why the abolition of these weapons of mass destruction constitutes the most important and long-cherished goal of the international community. However, since the release of the Canberra Commission report, in 1996, prospects for abolition have been weakened and the international community has reached a crossroads at which it must choose between the assured dangers of proliferation and the challenges of disarmament. Given this choice, there can be no standing still. My delegation shares the thinking of the Tokyo Forum when it states that progress towards nuclear disarmament is inextricably tied to success in non-proliferation efforts, so that without success in non-proliferation, the goal of zero nuclear weapons cannot be achieved. The consequence is that the central compact in the NPT between nuclear States and non-nuclear States, whereby the former committed themselves to nuclear disarmament and the latter renounced nuclear weapons, must be strengthened, the alternative being further proliferation and the continued revaluation of nuclear weapons in the twenty-first century.

During the preparatory process for the Conference to review the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), scheduled for the year 2000, we have seen with concern the increasing lack of political understanding between the parties - nuclear States and non-nuclear States - to the said Treaty as to how to progress in a manner which is effective and satisfactory for all the interested parties towards the securing of the ultimate objectives of the NPT. I consider it appropriate to mention on this occasion that in 1995, when the Government of Chile justified its accession to the NPT, just before the holding of the Review and Extension Conference for that Treaty, on which occasion the parties agreed to convert it into an instrument of unlimited duration, Chile did so in the conviction that the obligations and rights arising from it, for each and every one of the parties, constitute a genuine

(Mr. Illanes, Chile)

programme of action to reach the above-mentioned objectives, and with the idea that the international community was advancing resolutely towards the objective of non-proliferation and towards the achievement of the ultimate purpose of nuclear disarmament: the total abolition of nuclear weapons. But in no way did we seek to establish an international order based upon the perpetual existence of a small group of States with the right to possess nuclear weapons and a great majority without that right. Today we are deeply worried and disappointed at the course that the preparatory process for the Year 2000 NPT Review Conference has taken, which is essentially irrelevant to the objective of the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Among other important conclusions, the aforementioned Tokyo report stated that a fissile material cut-off treaty is a precondition for success in nuclear non-proliferation as well as a building block for nuclear disarmament, to the extent that it will help to curb nuclear proliferation and facilitate efforts to detect the clandestine acquisition and production of such types of weapon. Therefore, it calls on the Conference on Disarmament to act on the mandate on the negotiation of a convention on fissile material generated by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference and to implement the Shannon decision adopted by the Conference that same year. That would make it possible to overcome the paralysis which delayed the establishment of an ad hoc negotiating committee until August 1998 and has frustrated its re-establishment in 1999. My delegation endorses this call. A core question in the nuclear disarmament debate is that of determining which of the two options - nuclear deterrence or the abolition of nuclear weapons - offers greater national, regional and global security. The States that possess nuclear weapons maintain that they enhance their national security. However, their actions may lead rival Powers to acquire nuclear weapons, leading to diminished security for both and, moreover, for their neighbours. This is a conclusion which is familiar to us but which many prefer to ignore: national, regional and global security are not enhanced by the possession of nuclear weapons. In the present circumstances it is therefore essential for all States to redouble their efforts in favour of non-proliferation and disarmament, and in this context special mention is to be made of the initiative of the Coalition for a New Agenda, which has given a new impetus to the forums which have got stuck in the controversy of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence versus that of the setting of a fixed framework of time for the achievement of nuclear disarmament.

The paragraphs which the Tokyo Forum devotes to the Conference on Disarmament are questionable. However, it is difficult not to appreciate the general importance which it assigns to the normalization of our work in order to attain the noble objective of disarmament. This leads us to refer to the issue of the deadlock which has been affecting the work of the CD for three years. This impasse disturbs us, although it has often been said that it is normal for the CD to have periods in which it can do no useful work because the conditions are not ripe for agreement in the international community and that this does not in fact impair its work because more positive moments will later come about in which progress can be made. This seemed to be true, particularly, during the cold war. Nevertheless, when the cold war ended it seemed logical to believe that an era was beginning in which, free from these

(Mr. Illanes, Chile)

cycles of enmity and suspicion, it would be possible to achieve important and sustained progress in all areas of disarmament, and particularly in the control and subsequent elimination of nuclear weapons. These hopes regrettably did not last long, and we see with concern that the process started timidly a few years ago is already deadlocked.

We are not so naïve as to think that the mere better handling of the work of the CD, which could be obtained through some reforms aimed at rationalizing its procedures, would in itself produce meaningful progress in the results of our work. It is evident that there is a correlation between the "productivity" of this body and the conditions of a degree of harmony or greater tension and mistrust among the great Powers and even among other actors in the international arena. Nevertheless, many delegations consider that, even in this highly unpromising current scene, the CD could emerge from its paralysis and approve a programme of work which would enable it to resume its activities. While attainment of this objective remains pending, the Chilean delegation wishes to refer to the possibility and desirability of laying down some operating arrangements of limited scope which, without altering the CD's current procedural framework, would enable it to carry out useful work to prepare the ground and facilitate the later initiation of possible negotiations on the various items on our agenda.

At the end of the CD's 1997 session, the Chilean delegation presented some ideas based on this philosophy. Later, in March 1998, I was appointed Special Coordinator for the item of the improved and effective functioning of the CD, and a year ago I had the honour to report to the Conference on the outcome of the consultations I had carried out on this topic. In those consultations various possibilities were explored, among which was one involving the establishment of certain more or less permanent committees or working groups, for each item of the agenda, on the understanding that their establishment would in no way imply an intention, still less a commitment, to initiate a negotiating process on a specific binding international instrument. The objective of their activities would be "to clarify national positions while seeking to promote convergences". The consultations to which I am referring with the CD delegations and observers were very interesting and a large number of comments were formulated. This idea in particular received ample support, but it also raised doubts among several delegations and even openly negative reactions. I will resist the temptation to detail these reactions because it would unduly prolong my statement and, above all, because the proposal which I am about to suggest today, while similar, is different from the 1997 proposal, and therefore does not have the same merits nor the same defects.

In the report presented to the Conference I spoke of the desirability of continuing the examination of these questions in 1999 and highlighted the general support given to the Presidential troika procedure and the unanimous importance the members of the Conference had attached to the intensification of the informal consultations carried out by the President, to facilitate progress in the work of the Conference. It is on the basis of that unanimous support for the Presidential consultations that the Chilean delegation now wishes to formulate the proposal that it should be the President of the

(Mr. Illanes, Chile)

Conference himself who should organize consultations on each item of the agenda, which would be in the nature of informal pre-negotiation discussions. The President could chair these discussions himself or entrust this task to "Friends of the Chair". They would be open-ended, without records or any kind of official documentation, and would be open to all delegations and observers in the CD. It could be argued that weekly informal consultations carried out by the President with the regional group coordinators already exist, but the difference lies in the fact that all countries would participate in the proposed consultations, thus enriching them with their ideas. At the same time, these consultations would be far more specialized than the current ones, as they would focus on each item of the agenda.

We all know well that the CD is a negotiating body, and that we must not transform it into a forum for endless debate or talks about talks. However, the discussions we are suggesting would not have this undesirable character, since they would take place in a strictly informal set-up, which could even be a closed meeting. As they would be focused on preparing the ground for possible negotiations, they would be activities we might term pre-negotiations, in which all relevant options and procedures could be discussed. In short, these exchanges would enable us to move forward in studying and thinking about the many complex aspects of each agenda item but without this entailing, as I have said, a process of negotiating a convention, or even implying a commitment by delegations to the idea of entering eventually into negotiating the terms of such a convention. This would enable the CD to bring viewpoints closer to formulas of compromise and understanding which might facilitate agreement on the commencement of the actual negotiation of a convention. Hence this is a suggestion of limited scope which the President of the Conference himself could put into practice, in the course of his normal duties, either before the adoption of the programme of work or afterwards. The Chilean delegation presents this suggestion to the Conference in the hope of facilitating its functioning, since we sincerely believe it could contribute in some measure to achieving this important objective.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Chile for his statement and his thoughtful reflections on our work, as well as the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium, Ambassador André Mernier.

Mr. MERNIER (Belgium) (translated from French): Mr. Presdient, since I am taking the floor for the first time under your presidency, I would like to begin by congratulating you on your accession to this lofty function and assuring you of the full cooperation of my delegation.

It is the privilege of ambassadors called by their Governments to other duties to take the floor as it were to take stock of their assignment and to reflect on the prospects for the institution they have to leave. In this spirit, allow me to take one of the last plenary meetings of the Conference on Disarmament to sum up or at least trace the main outlines of the situation as my delegation sees it. Unfortunately, this situation is not at all encouraging. For three years the Conference on Disarmament has been hesitating and prevaricating. For three years no serious negotiations have been launched. This state of affairs is all the more alarming because there is no shortage of challenges. Allow me to devote a few words to them.

(Mr. Mernier, Belgium)

First of all, nuclear disarmament. This question is obviously an absolute priority for all of us, including - I am happy to say - those who are principally concerned. We cannot doubt the resolve of the United States of America and Russia to continue the START process. This process, which is and should remain a bilateral process, has already led to important achievements. Yet much remains to be done to reduce a threat which hangs over all of us and is legitimately everybody's concern. This common interest should be acknowledged, and here the Conference on Disarmament has a part to play by institutionalizing a dialogue, an exchange of information, which at present do not exist. It is fortunate in this respect that the nuclear States have responded positively to the proposal made by five countries, including my own, for seeking ways and means of establishing such an exchange. The priority allocated to nuclear disarmament will not disappear overnight, since it stems from the size of the existing arsenals and the gravity of the threat they represent.

Still on nuclear matters, as regards non-proliferation, it is worrying, alarming, that more than four years after the adoption of Ambassador Shannon's mandate and report the negotiations on the prohibition of the production of fissile material for explosive purposes have not been able to begin. This is all the more serious since nothing has changed as to substance. The need for such a treaty remains urgent. So how can we come to terms with such inertia? Neither procedural quibbles nor tactical subtleties can justify the present vacuum. We can never repeat too often that a cut-off treaty is in everybody's interest, particularly the non-nuclear members of the NPT. We can never repeat too often that it is an indispensable brake on vertical proliferation. Is the present situation not paradoxical? The nuclear Powers are offering to impose new restrictions upon themselves, while certain potential beneficiaries of this cut-off are manoeuvring and making demands which are paralysing negotiations whose conclusion can only strengthen their security. Just as worrying recently is the challenge posed by the deployment of weapons in space. Technological developments are making such an enterprise more and more feasible and therefore more and more tempting. Such a change in strategic equilibria could not fail to pose a challenge to the Conference on Disarmament and make its task more difficult. Has this issue not already made the establishment of the agenda and programme of work more complicated this year?

This alarming situation naturally raises questions about the way our institution works. In my view, the procedures of the Conference on Disarmament need to be re-examined in the light of the disappointments of the last few years. Three points spontaneously come to mind. First, consensus. This rule cannot be challenged because it is at the basis and it is the corollary of our aspiration to universality. Recently, however, the consensus has been distorted into a veto. The ease, the heedlessness with which it is too often resorted to are redolent of the abuse of rights. A change of attitude can only facilitate our work. And finally, groups. This structure must be reconsidered. It is a vestige of the cold war and no longer corresponds with present facts. Who, indeed, is unaware that this pernicious anachronism is slowly tipping the old East-West opposition into a North-South antagonism which is even more sterile? It is not enough to be aware of this danger, we also have to find an answer to it. Even more disturbing is the

(Mr. Mernier, Belgium)

constraint of the annual renewal of the agenda and the programme of work. For an institution whose working year is limited to 24 weeks, this annual procedure is a real shackle. Is it not time to change this rule, whose application has made the Conference on Disarmament into a new Sisyphus? Is it not time to agree on the automatic rolling over of the agenda and the programme of work from one year to the next; on preserving in this way what has been achieved in the long and difficult negotiations which have led to their adoption?

I have dwelt at length on the rules of procedure, but for all that one should not believe that a modification of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament can on its own bring us out of the deadlock. We must not forget that it is the political will of States which is decisive here. If this remains weak, or missing, the paralysis will persist. No change to the rules of procedure can replace the collective will to conduct a dialogue, to negotiate and to reach a conclusion.

I cannot leave Geneva without making a more personal summary of this important stage of my career. As for many of my colleagues, these three years have been spent on disarmament in the broadest sense of the word, that is, well beyond the Conference on Disarmament stricto sensu. Thus it was that I had an opportunity to be personally and deeply involved in the Ottawa Process, to see it reach a conclusion and to be present at the first conference of States parties last May in Maputo. Many people in this room have had this experience and no doubt have drawn the same conclusions. The most important is assuredly that when political will is fed by public opinion it can achieve great things, and can do so fast and well. I must also mention the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. After having headed the Belgian delegation, I had the good fortune to be the Vice-Chairman in 1996 and the Chairman in 1998. These experiences have been of great interest to me and have deeply convinced me of the value of this annual exercise. It is clearly important for these New York reunions to take place, but it is also essential for the Geneva delegations to bring regularly to New York the expert knowledge and experience which only the Conference on Disarmament can provide. I would also like to say how happy I am to have been able to participate right from the beginning in the two expert groups set up by the Secretary-General on the complex and very urgent problem of small arms. This question, which is still far from being solved, will keep you very busy, ladies and gentlemen, in the coming years.

Finally, allow me to pay tribute to the colleagues who are present here for the assistance they have given me over these years. Their knowledge, their know-how, their advice, their collegiality have been extremely precious to me. I cannot hide the interest and often the intense joy I experienced in seeing several among them display their art and their professional skill. This will remain for sure one of my best memories of Geneva and even New York. Each of us, of course, upholds the positions and interests of his Government. However, never has the sense of collegiality failed, never have our fundamental differences given rise to any personal animosity. This is another sign of professionalism, which we cannot but welcome. Finally, the secretariat, and especially Ambassador Petrovsky and his deputy Mr. Bensmail,

(Mr. Mernier, Belgium)

have always assisted me with their experience and valuable advice, as has Mrs. Lewis and her UNIDIR team. It would be remiss of me to overlook the interpreters and the entire technical staff, without whom the Conference could not work. I would like to conclude, Mr. President, by paying a personal tribute to you and to your many predecessors, for the tenacity which you have shown to make this body an essential forum which is so necessary to the international community for its security and future. It is also with pleasure that I welcome Mr. Dhanapala, who is sitting beside you. His interest in our work has never faltered, and his advice and friendship have always been most valuable to me.

The PRESIDENT: I am grateful to the distinguished Ambassador of Belgium for his statement and for the very kind words he has addressed to all of us and to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands, Ambassador Frank Majoor.

Mr. MAJOOR (Netherlands): I have detected during the course of my participation in the deliberations in the already overregulated Conference on Disarmament a new unwritten rule which I would like to baptize the "Mounir Zahran rule" and to which I, although not exactly a staunch defender of the CD's rigid rules, am going to adhere. The distinguished Ambassador of Egypt recently made an impressive farewell speech of nine pages after having served in the Conference for nine years. Two weeks ago the distinguished Ambassador of Canada made a thought-provoking farewell speech of four pages after having participated for four years in the CD's deliberations and negotiations. And there are more examples of this linear relationship between the length of the stay and the farewell speech. So, according to that rule, my farewell will not exceed two pages.

This "imposed" self-restraint is not particularly difficult to exercise in my case. After two years of hard work I hardly have anything to show for it and no personal achievements really to be proud of. I was present, but unfortunately not at the or any creation. Also, I did not hold any office other than that of representative of my country: not the always challenging function of President of the Conference (Mr. President, my heartfelt congratulations on your assumption of this high office for the rest of this year, and many thanks for the kind words addressed to me); not the increasingly rare function of Chairman of an Ad Hoc Committee; not the fulfilling position of Special Coordinator; and not even the prestigious coordinatorship of the Western Group. Seen from your table, Mr. President, I simply moved from the right side of the central back bench to the far corner of the left wing, where I am now sitting since the welcome and long overdue expansion of the Conference. And here, a warm welcome to Ireland, Ecuador, Tunisia, Malaysia and Kazakhstan to our midst.

Most of you identify me and my country with "Transparency in armaments", one of the subjects to which we continue to attach great importance and to which some of you unfortunately - and, if I may say, mistakenly - have assigned low priority, although transparency and confidence-building, difficult as these concepts are, are at the root of any security arrangement

(Mr. Majoor, Netherlands)

and a precondition for peace and stability. My wish would be that our traditional United Nations resolution dealing with transparency and the United Nations arms register will surpass 100 co-sponsors this year, and more importantly, will be adopted, as in the early years of the register, without a vote.

I am however not going to dwell on that subject. I am also not going to reiterate the merits of the proposal of the five (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Norway and the Netherlands) on the issue of nuclear disarmament, although that proposal - whether you like it or not - remains at least one of the two keys to a breakthrough on the work programme of the CD. A focused exchange of information and views on nuclear disarmament is more imminent than ever, as events and developments, also most recently, clearly demonstrate.

What I want to share with you today are three or four observations on the past two years in Geneva, which have been enriching, both from a personal and a professional viewpoint.

First, I now have a better understanding of what is meant by the CD being the sole negotiating body on disarmament. It clearly does not mean - what I was led to believe - that the CD solely negotiates; nor that it does negotiate. It turns out that it means that the CD can theoretically negotiate, but prefers not to do so until all underlying problems have been resolved, by the CD or preferably elsewhere.

My second observation is that the CD therefore has become - and I hope only for the time being - a forum for "dialogue and deliberations, rather than negotiations". If under the prevailing international security circumstances we see value in at least pursuing a dialogue in the CD on disarmament - and I believe so - then we should be more generous in allowing for a focused dialogue. Some proper means should be found - and Ambassador Illanes made valuable proposals and presented valuable ideas on this subject - to avoid linkage and the strict application of the consensus rule for the establishment of mechanisms that provide for a focused dialogue, be it special coordinators or ad hoc committees with a deliberative mandate.

Thirdly, the group structure of the CD is not conducive to open and focused dialogue. As the group structure now functions it mainly serves as a shield for those delegations who want to play hide-and-seek.

Lastly, it has become much clearer to me what is meant by the CD being the best club in town. Many, mainly outside the CD, associate it with the culinary traditions and savoir vivre of disarmament delegates, whether they reside in Geneva or for longer periods in New York. Indeed, it cannot be denied that the CD maintains a high standard in this respect. And I enjoyed that particularly in my final days. Another meaning is that the CD is the haute école of international diplomacy. Ambassador Moher also referred to this. There is indeed some truth in this, although during my two-year curriculum many courses were cancelled, particularly those on "negotiating skills", while the classes in "delaying tactics" and "creative obstruction" became somewhat repetitive. The third meaning of the best club - and for me that is the real meaning - is the unique way colleagues in the CD get along with each other. The CD is well known for maintaining a "good atmosphere" -

(Mr. Majoor, Netherlands)

one of its main objectives and achievements nowadays - despite sometimes forceful exchanges. I have never before experienced such an intellectual group of colleagues, with such profound knowledge of the subjects at hand, with so much experience in and commitment to multilateral cooperation in the field of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation and at the same time so extraordinarily friendly, open, and hospitable and - I am afraid I have to add - professionally so regrettably underutilized at this point in time.

It was a privilege and a very special experience to have participated in the deliberations of the Conference. I thank you, Mr. President, for the pleasant cooperation and friendship that I have encountered, and I include in those thanks all your predecessors of the last two years. I also would like to thank the Secretary-General, Vladimir Petrovsky, the Deputy Secretary-General, Abdelkader Bensmail, and their devoted staff, Under-Secretary-General, Jayantha Dhanapala, and all my colleagues here and my own staff during these two years - Onno Kervers, Thymen Kouwenaar, Henriette Houben and Mireille Geerlings - for their cooperation and friendship. Thank you all.

I am going to miss the CD, Geneva and New York tremendously, but most of all my colleagues; I am sure, however, that we will meet again here in Geneva, in The Hague - a major candidate for the seat of the BW organization - or elsewhere.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of the Netherlands for his very stimulating statement - concise statement, I should say, and for the kind words addressed to the Chair and to his colleagues.

That concludes my list of speakers for today. Is there any other delegation which wishes to take the floor this morning? I see none.

Before bringing our meeting to a close I would just say a few brief words about my own continuing work as President. As I foreshadowed last week, I intended to be energetic in continuing the pattern of intensive consultations of my predecessors in trying to test whether there remained any scope for agreement on a work programme. I have done that and a number of you will be aware of the extent of those consultations. I intend to continue in that process over the coming days as we at the same time and simultaneously start our work on the annual report. I do that since I do remain hopeful of some further convergence in the time available, and I continue this work in the belief that agreement on a work programme, or at the very least some consolidated convergence on it, will enhance our prospects for expeditious commencement of our substantive work as soon as possible.

With those brief remarks, I conclude our business for today. The next plenary meting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 2 September at 10 a.m., and I would remind you that, as I said earlier, we will convene in an informal plenary meeting in 10 minutes' time to start the consideration of the draft annual report.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.